

## SELF-IMAGE, BELIEFS, AND INNER CONVERSATIONS

(*"What am I telling myself?"*)



A self-image is a "picture" of how you see yourself. This picture of yourself might consist of an actual image or "picture" in your mind's eye or it might consist of certain beliefs that you hold about yourself. A belief is nothing more than a system of thoughts that *you tell yourself* over and over and which you take to be true. A belief is maintained by the continual affirmation of these thoughts. Thinking is nothing more than an internal conversation that you are having *with* yourself, *about* yourself, *about* others or *about* reality. We often think that it is "crazy" when we see people talking to themselves but the truth is, you are talking to yourself every moment of your waking day. This "inner conversation" is not something that we always "hear" or reveal yet it governs virtually everything we do and say in any situation.

We all know this process well. Recall a time when you were first asked to speak in front of a group or class. What is your "inner conversation" at the time? It might go something like, "What if I make a fool of myself, I'll probably say something real stupid, what if they don't like me, what am I going to say, they'll probably think I'm crazy" and on and on. These inner thoughts may be so persistent that we don't even hear them or they may have turned into sub-conscious *beliefs* that we hold about ourselves. "I'll make a fool of myself." "People think I am stupid." "They don't like me." "I never know what to say." "I must be crazy." To the degree that we hold these beliefs as true will determine our *self-image*. "I'm a fool", "I'm stupid", "I'm unlikable", and "I'm crazy". Furthermore if I take these beliefs to be *true* I will greatly limit my freedom to *be* in the world.

The fact that you talk to yourself does not mean that you are crazy. The clearer you can "tune in" to this inner conversation in any situation will determine the degree you are in charge of your life. In fact, *not* listening to your inner conversation, *pretending* that these thoughts do not exist, *avoiding* facing your inner world is what leads to *real* craziness and unconscious behavior.

How we view ourselves *now* in life is often a result of decisions we have made at earlier times *and which we still affirm to ourselves over and over in the present*. A "decision" that we make about ourselves, about others or about reality becomes the core belief system that governs our behavior and outlook on life. And this belief is sustained by our thinking. That is why this exercise is so important because you are focusing in on some of the "root" decisions you made about your life, which are based on *what you tell yourself*. By tuning in to what you are telling yourself, you are positioning yourself to re-evaluate some of these core beliefs.

This exercise goes hand in hand with the previous one. It is an exercise in "tuning in" to your inner conversation. In the MEMORIES AND EMOTIONS exercise, you described your memories and emotions within the course of your relationship. Here, you will be using the results of that exercise and simply going back and adding further descriptions of your self-image, your beliefs about yourself or your "inner conversation" at the time. These descriptions are generally short phrases or words

that describe how you *see* (or saw) yourself, what you *tell* (or told) yourself *about* yourself (or others) or how you *feel* (or felt) about yourself (or others).

Go back to the previous exercise and re-read your entries. As you read them, see if you can place yourself back during those times and see if you can get in touch with your inner conversations and write down what you imagine was really going on inside of you.